NCO Corner

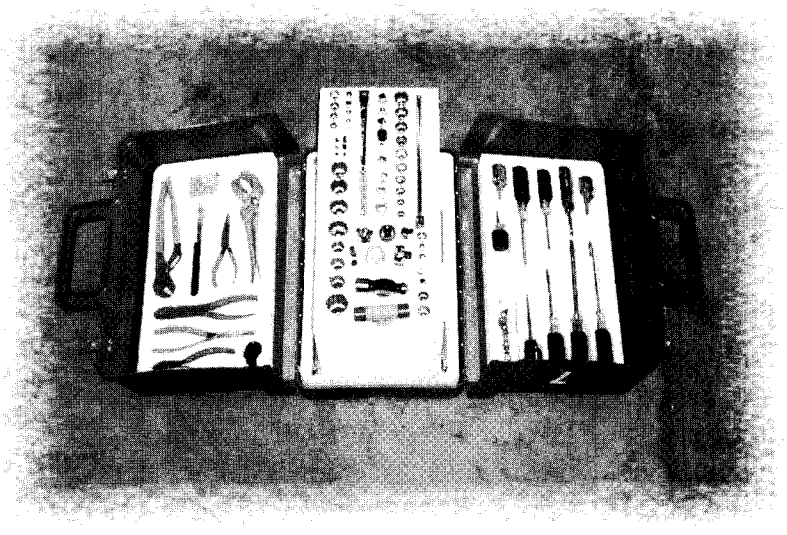
NEW AVIATION TOOL SYSTEM (NATS)

POSITIVE SAFETY RESULTS SHOW THE VALUE OF ARMY'S NEW AVIATION TOOL SYSTEM (NATS)

It took a bit of time and "doing" to gain program approval and then to accomplish design, testing, and reconfiguration and, finally, fielding of NATS. But now the Army is beginning to reap the positive results envisioned several years ago for the new tool system.

NATS is a tool system designed to bring about a new level of tool control and accountability. It supports AR 385-95, *Army Accident Prevention*, which requires commanders to establish foreign object damage (FOD) prevention programs that, in turn, require unit personnel to "ensure all tools, hardware and other equipment are properly accounted for at the end of each maintenance operation." NATS and this regulation, working together, will substantially reduce FOD and increase safety in Army aviation.

Since Army aviation began, there has been a not-so-well-appreciated discipline required of aviation maintenance personnel. That discipline is tool control. Because of the potential negative impact of improper tool control upon the safety of the aviator and his/her equipment, as well as the responsible aviation mechanic, there has been significant interest in finding "a better way." Ultimately, this concern led to outright insistence upon what has evolved into NATS. Approval of NATS for Army aviation provided an opportunity to satisfy an additional long-standing request from mechanics—higher quality tools.



Recently, the Aviation Ground Support Equipment (AGSE) office at Huntsville, Alabama received an e-mail from an OH-58 maintenance test pilot who had been about to test fly an aircraft after the crew chief had made an adjustment to the pitch change links which connect the flight controls to the rotor head. He inspected the adjustments and then looked around the area for tools and other debris. He did not notice anything out of the ordinary.

As he walked by the mechanic's toolbox, he observed that an open-end wrench was missing from its slot. He humorously inquired if the mechanic had "Lost his tools already." The mechanic replied that he had them all before he started the repair. Fortunately, the test pilot got back on the aircraft and found the missing wrench stuck in the aircraft rotor system swashplate. How unfortunate it might have been if the pre-NATS toolboxes (the ones without the NATS instant inventory feature) had still been in service. Possibly the test pilot would have started the aircraft and done severe damage to both the aircraft and, he says, "my ego."

Even though the tool control features that are designed into the NATS tools have proven effective, the mechanic must follow a disciplined tool control process. He must ensure that all toolboxes have been returned to the toolbox at the end of each aircraft maintenance task. Field Manual 1-500, *Army Aviation Maintenance*, requires this process.

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